

# "Jesus: Friend of Sinners"

Luke 7:36-50

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## Introduction:

Most of you know that I love going to garage sales. I am not the kind of person to spend all day doing it, and I will not travel across town or anything like that, but when I am out and around and I see a sign for a garage sale, the pull is almost irresistible. A year or two ago, I remember riding my bike to the hospital to visit one of our members, and on the way I stopped at one particular sale, and at that time I was looking for a good watermelon knife. So I pull into the sale on my bike, and I see the perfect knife for just a dollar or two. I get it, and then I realize that I am on my bike, I cannot leave it in the car, and so I will need to take that knife with me on the hospital visit. That was an interesting visit—to show up representing the church, looking for one of our members, and to show up at the front desk with a 12-inch knife! **"I'm here from the church, and I'm looking for one of our members!"** I know that a lot of us, though, really enjoy finding a good bargain—finding something that is valuable to us but is no longer valuable to the one who is having the sale.

I am reminded of a young couple who were having a garage sale who were selling a large mirror that they had received as a wedding gift. They had held on to it for a number of years, but the mirror had a very strange-looking aqua-marine border around it. The frame was a very unusual color, so they just couldn't find a room where it would fit in. Well, they offered it for sale, and almost immediately a man stepped up and bought it for just a few bucks, and as he was leaving, the man said, **"I am so excited to find such a beautiful mirror—especially to find one where the gold frame is still covered by the protective plastic!"** You see, the young couple had failed to realize that the mirror was not really aqua-marine, but it was a beautiful golden frame that was simply covered by a protective film! And so the man at the garage sale had made an amazing discovery! We are very familiar with the old saying, **"One man's trash is another man's treasure."**

This morning, I would like for us to study a passage where Jesus treats as valuable a woman who had been tossed aside as trash by the leaders in the religious world of the First Century. The account is found in Luke 7, and in our pew Bibles, the passage is found on page 1611. **»PPT»** As we study any passage in the book of Luke, we need to realize that the author is a medical doctor. He is referred to by the apostle Paul in Colossians 4: 14 as the **"beloved physician."** Based on his name, he is apparently a gentile, and as we read through Luke's gospel account, we discover that he has a way of paying special attention to those who are downtrodden and overlooked in society. In the book of Luke, we read about the common people

receiving Christ gladly. We read about women and children. We read about those who are afflicted with leprosy and blindness. We read about those who are paralyzed and demon-possessed. We read about a widow's son being raised from the dead. We read about a gentile Roman centurion's son being healed of a terrible disease. The centurion is praised as Jesus says, ***"I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith,"*** praise for a gentile and a slam on the Jewish leaders. Later in the book of **Luke**, we read about a "good Samaritan," what would have been an oxymoron to most Jews in the First Century. We read about the poor and those who were rejected and abused by society.

And by the time we get to the middle of **Luke 7**, the tension is right there at the breaking point. People had come to a point of decision, and in **Luke 7:29-30**, the Bible says, ***"When all the people and the tax collectors heard this, they acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John."***

And so we have a huge contrast: On one hand, Jesus was accepted as the Son of God by the tax collectors and sinners, but on the other hand He was just plain rejected by the Pharisees and the lawyers and the other religious leaders. You can feel the tension right there in the middle of **Luke 7**. Jesus goes on and (in **verse 34**) He refers to a common accusation, that He was, ***"...a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!"*** Jesus was a friend of sinners, and it's almost as if Dr. Luke just comes right out and answers that accusation in the paragraph that comes next. How did Jesus get the reputation of being a friend of sinners? That question brings us to the account starting in **Luke 7:36**.

**I. As we begin, I would like for us to notice, first of all, THE MAIN CHARACTERS HERE, and specifically, THE SITUATION AS IT UNFOLDS IN VERSES 36-39. »PPT»**

If you will, please look with me at **Luke 7:36-39**...

<sup>36</sup> ***Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.*** <sup>37</sup> ***And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume,*** <sup>38</sup> ***and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume.*** <sup>39</sup> ***Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner."***

As we look at these first four verses, I would like for us to look at the main characters and plug ourselves in a little bit to see where we fit in, to see if we can see ourselves here. But the first main character is obviously one of the leading Pharisees. A little bit later, we will discover that his name is Simon. By definition, the word Pharisee refers to one who is "separated." And so these are people whose claim to fame was that they were different. They were "separated." They were very strict in their outward observance of the Law of Moses. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead. We know from other passages that many of them were self-righteous. Many were hypocrites. Many of them enjoyed looking down their noses at others who were not as religious as they were. And as we noticed earlier from **verse 30**, the Pharisees (for the most part) had rejected God's purpose for themselves. The Pharisees had made a decision that Jesus was not a messenger from God who was to be followed. They had rejected the plan of God.

It is interesting, then, that Simon the Pharisee even invites Jesus into his home for a meal in the first place. But as we look back at **verse 36**, I think we find a little clue concerning what was going on here. In **verse 36**, we discover that Jesus, ***"...entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table."*** Did you notice what's missing there? This dinner would have been a huge deal. To put it in terms we can understand, this would have been a little bit like having a presidential candidate over for dinner. Jesus was well-known all over this area, He had been healing people left and right, and so Simon invites Jesus into his home, and (like today) so much can come from eating dinner with an influential person, there is so much potential for fellowship and learning, but we notice that there is something missing here!

Back in the First Century, when you invited someone into your home, the culture of that time demanded that you provide for the washing of the feet of the guest. Today, we don't really think about it, but our feet don't normally get very dirty. We get up in the morning and shower, we put on fresh socks, we put on clean shoes, we drive to work in an air-conditioned car, we sit down at a desk all day, and we go home—our feet do not get dirty! But in the First Century, the washing of feet was mandatory. People would walk all day long, they wore sandals, and they walked on narrow paths shared with animals. On top of that, they did not sit on wooden chairs at a table, but they basically laid down and propped themselves up on one arm, and so their feet were right there in the face of the next guy! As you can imagine, the washing of feet was pretty important. It was also customary to anoint the head of each guest with oil. It was customary to greet each guest with a kiss.

But in **verse 36**, Simon did nothing! Jesus came in and just had to sit down. I don't know if we have anything that would be exactly like this today. I guess here in Wisconsin, it is customary to make sure a guest knows where to put his winter coat. So maybe it would be like allowing an honored guest to go through dinner wearing his winter coat—I don't know. Or maybe it would be a little bit like someone reaching out to shake our hand, and we just stand there looking at the hand. Only rarely have I seen that happen—even people who hate each other, if someone offers a hand, the other person will almost always respond with a handshake. But whatever the case, it was a snub. Simon invited Jesus into his home and then did nothing to make Him

feel welcome. Jesus got nothing but the cold shoulder. As I see it, the whole thing was a set-up, a message to say, **"You are not welcome here,"** a set-up to see how Jesus would respond. Simon invites the Son of God into his home, and then he basically slaps Him in the face.

But then, thank God, we are introduced to another character in this story. In verse 37, we discover a woman; a woman, as Luke points out, **"...who was a sinner"**! We see the reference again in verse 39. There is no doubt about it that this woman was a sinful person. She knew it, Simon knew it, and Jesus knew it. This woman had a reputation as being a sinner. In other words, if we were walking downtown in that city and if we were to see this woman, we would all say, **"Oh look, there's the sinner woman!"** The word **"sinner"** here refers to someone who was in the habit of missing the mark. We do not know what her sin was, but we do know that she had a reputation of being a sinful woman.

Starting in verse 37, as soon as she learns that Jesus is dining with Simon, she brings an alabaster vial of perfume, and (in verse 38) she approaches Jesus from behind, she starts weeping, she begins to wet His feet with her tears, and then she keeps on wiping His feet with her hair. She then continues kissing His feet and anointing His feet with the perfume. What an amazing picture! She does not care what all of these respectable people think, but she breaks down and worships the Lord with one of the most heart-felt acts of worship that we find anywhere in the entire Bible. Here is Jesus with the dusty feet covered with grime and dung, and this woman keeps on kissing, and wiping, and weeping. Apparently she lets down her long hair. The Bible tells us in 1 Corinthians 11:15 that a woman's long hair is her **"glory."** So she takes down her hair, but the more she wipes with her hair the more she weeps, and she continues.

I don't know if we can really appreciate this. Have you ever wondered how much crying it would take to wash someone's feet? This is not just a little tear that wells up when we watch a sad movie, this is **"weeping."** This is the kind of crying that we see from a young mother at the grave of a child. This woman is completely unconcerned about what everybody else might be thinking. This woman does not care. And it's interesting that Jesus does not seem to be embarrassed. Jesus lets her do it.

As all of this happens, we find in verse 39 that Simon forms an opinion. Apparently, Simon is embarrassed, Simon is offended, Simon not only judges the woman, but he judges Jesus as well. As he sees it, Jesus is endorsing and encouraging this woman's sinful behavior, and so Simon reasons to himself, **"If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner."**

I don't know about you, but I can almost see a smile on Simon's face. In Simon's mind, he's saying, **"Gotcha! I finally have something to nail this guy on!"** Simon is looking at a beautiful mirror through the protective coating. Simon refuses to see what Jesus can see. And that brings us to the next paragraph...

## II. ...because in verses 40-43, JESUS TELLS A PARABLE. **►PPT►**

If you will, please look with me at what happens next, Luke 7:40-43...

***<sup>40</sup> And Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher." <sup>41</sup> "A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. <sup>42</sup> "When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?" <sup>43</sup> Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have judged correctly."***

Did you notice what happened in verse 40? Jesus **"answered"** and said something to Simon. What was Jesus answering? Verse 39 says that Simon said something **"to himself."** That's a little disturbing, isn't it? Jesus was answering a thought that Simon had about the sinful woman! We learn this morning that even our thoughts about other people are important. Jesus hears our thoughts, and we will answer for those thoughts on the Day of Judgment.

So in response to his thought, Jesus says, **"Simon, I have something to say to you."** And Simon replies, **"Say it, Teacher."** **"Tell me, o great prophet who does not even know who is touching you. Go ahead, make my day. I dare you! Tell me something I don't know!"** And Jesus responds with one of the simplest parables anywhere in the Bible. A guy has loaned money to two other men, neither one is able to pay it back, the lender forgives both debts (one big, one small), and Jesus wants to know which one will love the lender more. We can almost see Simon squirming in his chair as he says (in verse 43), **"I suppose the one whom he forgave more."** Jesus then affirms that Simon gave the right answer.

We need to understand that a denarius was a day's wage. So, if we put this into modern terms that we can understand, based on an average salary in Madison of around \$50,000 a year, one man owed \$70,000 and the other man owed \$7,000. We need to notice that the difference was not a difference in level of guilt—they were both guilty. Neither one had the ability to repay the debt. Spiritually speaking, they were both lost. One sin or a hundred sins will keep us out of heaven. So it seems that Jesus was talking about their awareness of guilt. He was trying to communicate on Simon's level. From Simon's point of view, the woman was really, really guilty, while he himself wasn't really bad at all. But Jesus makes the point that both are in over their heads. Neither one could repay the debt—whether \$7,000 or \$70,000, it does not matter. We are spiritually bankrupt in the eyes of God. We are unable to pay it back.

And so we find here that God forgives. Forgiveness is not free. God pays the debt. Our forgiveness was paid for with the death of Jesus on the cross. But Simon still could not really see it. If he had seen it, Simon would have been the one weeping at the feet of Jesus.

III. As we come to the end here, we find that **JESUS MAKES THE APPLICATION.** Jesus answers the question, "**SO WHAT?**" Jesus answers that question for Simon, and He answers it for all of us here this morning. **»PPT»** If you will, please look with me at **verses 44-50...**

*<sup>44</sup> Turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. <sup>45</sup> "You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. <sup>46</sup> "You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. <sup>47</sup> "For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." <sup>48</sup> Then He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven." <sup>49</sup> Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?" <sup>50</sup> And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."*

Did we notice the non-verbal communication back up in **verse 44**? Up until this point, Jesus had been politely looking at Simon. Jesus had been engaged with the host. But now we find that Jesus turns away from Simon, He turns to the woman, and with His back to Simon, he looks at the woman and says to Simon, "***Do you see this woman?***" How powerful! And the answer to that question has to be "***No!***" Simon had not seen the woman! Simon did not see a "***woman,***" Simon saw a "***sinner.***" Simon had no idea who this woman really was. And the implication is that Simon was looking at the wrong things. Simon was looking at that nasty-looking protective film on the beautiful mirror. Simon was so blind, in fact, that he was unable even to see Jesus for who He truly was. Simon had invited the Creator of the Universe into his home for dinner and had failed even to greet Him at the door! Simon had snubbed the Son of God! Simon had missed the opportunity of a lifetime. And don't we know that when Jesus returns, Simon will forever wish that he had traded places with this sinful woman?

So now, in front of all of his friends, Jesus exposes Simon for what he really is. In every way, Simon's hospitality was far out-done by a sinful woman who walked in off the street. Instead of water, she washed the Lord's feet with tears from her heart. Instead of a towel, she used her hair. Instead of the standard kiss on the cheek, she continually kissed His feet from the time He walked in the door. And instead of the standard oil, this woman anointed the Lord with perfume.

The lesson is: Our love for God is expressed in direct proportion to our understanding of what the Lord has done for us. Based on the parable, the implication here is that Simon had not really been forgiven. Here's a thought question: What if Jesus had turned to Simon and had said, "***Simon, YOUR sins have been forgiven.***" I think Simon would have been offended, because in his own mind, Simon did not need forgiveness. Simon's reply would have been, "***Who me? No thanks, I'm good. I do not need to be forgiven.***" So here we have quite a contrast. On one hand, we

have Simon—a Pharisee, a religious leader, a man who sees no need for forgiveness. Simon was a sinner and didn't know it.

And then on the other hand we have a woman who is broken down in sin. She knows she's a sinner. Jesus knows she's a sinner. Simon knows she's a sinner. Everyone in that room knew that that woman was a sinner. She did not try to blame it on her childhood. She did not try to blame it on her mom and dad, or on her ex-husband, or on her boss, or on her children, or on the economy, or on her neighbors. She knew that she was broken down in sin, she knew that she needed forgiveness, and she knew that she was in spiritual debt far beyond her ability to ever repay. The Bible teaches that this attitude is one of the first and most important steps down the road to forgiveness.

I think we have the explanation, then, of the accusation back up in **verse 34** that Jesus was a **"friend to sinners."** Yes, He was! He treated this woman as a human being, made in the image of God, and someone whose sins were capable of being forgiven. Jesus treated that woman as a friend.

Think with me for a moment: If Jesus had said, **"You dirty, rotten, low-down, good for nothing, sinner, get away from my feet,"** He could have been right there with the Pharisees. He probably could have been accepted. But Jesus didn't do that, did He? Jesus saw her not as a sinner but as a **"woman."**

Here's another thought question: Do you think this woman was active in the early church? Do you think she cheerfully gave of her means on the first day of every week? Do you think she got involved in teaching the children of the congregation? Do you think she was faithful in her attendance? Do you think she visited the sick and those in jail?

### **Conclusion & Invitation:**

This morning as we close our thoughts on this passage, we need to ask ourselves: Are we more like Simon or are we more like the woman? May God help us to see our own sins and to look at the people around us just as Jesus looks at them!

For those of us who have been Christians for many years, it can be so difficult to truly remember the price that was paid for our sins, and to remember that at one time we were guilty. It is difficult, but it is not impossible. The Bible tells us about another Pharisee. This one had a run-in with Jesus on the road to Damascus. This one prayed and did not eat for three days, and at the end of those three days he was immersed in water so that his sins could be washed away. Looking back on it later, Paul would write to the young preacher Timothy and would say, **"It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all" (1 Timothy 1:15).**

If we came in this morning like Simon the Pharisee, we do not need to stay in that condition, but we can leave like Paul the Christian. I don't know about all of you, but

I am looking forward to meeting the forgiven woman in heaven! Won't it be interesting to hear this account from her point of view? Like the other guests at the banquet, we leave here this morning asking the same question, **"Who is this man who even forgives sins?"** If you know that you are living in sin, and if you are ready to throw yourself on the mercy of God, you need to know that forgiveness is available through our obedience to the gospel. We obey the good news when we turn away from sin and allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins. If you have any questions, we hope you will talk to us as soon as possible, but if you are ready to appeal to God for a good conscience right now (**1 Peter 3:21**), you can let us know about your decision as we sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [church@fourlakescoc.org](mailto:church@fourlakescoc.org)

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NOTE: After this lesson, the song leader led two very appropriate songs. The invitation song was, **"Love Lifted Me,"**

***All my heart to Him I give, ever to Him I'll cling, in His blessed presence live, ever His praises sing. Love so mighty and so true merits my soul's best songs; faithful, loving service, too, to Him belongs.***

And then, before the Lord's Supper, **"Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed?"**

***Thus might I hide my blushing face while His dear cross appears; dissolve my heart in thankfulness, and melt my eyes to tears. But drops of grief can ne'er repay the debt of love I owe: Here, Lord, I give myself away, 'tis all that I can do! At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light, and the burden of my heart rolled away, it was there by faith I received my sight, and now I am happy all the day!***